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by

MICHAEL HERTWIG-JAKSCH

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I provide a study of the persecution of the Christians at Lugdunum 177 A.D. Ancient sources--literary and epigraphical--as well as modern critical works have been consulted in order to gain an understanding of the status of the Christian Church during the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (later his joint rule with Commodus). The purpose of this is to acquire an appreciation for the cause and mechanics of the persecution of Christians at a time when the Church came into increasing conflict with popular religious beliefs, also to get an insight into the attitude and actions of the Imperial administration and its local representatives in Gaul towards the Christians. In particular I have tried to determine the authorship of the rescript to the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, and to explain the conflicting dates for the persecution given in our sources.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AJAH	American Journal of Ancient History (Boston)
AJPh	American Journal of Philology (Baltimore)
AJTh	American Journal of Theology
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung, ed. H. Temporini-W. Haase (Berlin-New York, 1972ff.)
Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome	A. Audin, Miroir de Rome dans les Gaules (Lyon, 1965)
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (Leipzig-Berlin, 1862-1940; ed. altera, ibid., 1893ff.)
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris)
CRAI	Comptes rendues de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (Paris)
Deininger, Provinziallandtage	J. Deininger, Die Provinziallandtage der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zum Ende des dritten Jahrhunderts n. Christus (Vestigia 6; München, 1965)
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain (Paris)
HE	Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiae
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies (London)
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies (Oxford)
Kornemann, Herrscherkulte	E. Kornemann, "Zur Geschichte der antiken Herrscherkulte," Klio 1 (1901), 51-146

OCD	Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. N. Hammond-H. Scullard, 2. edition (Oxford, 1979)
P&P	Past & Present (Kendal)
REA	Revue des Études Anciennes (Paris)
SHA	Scriptores Historiae Augustae
ZRG	Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte (Romanistische Abteilung) (Köln-Böhlau)

INTRODUCTION

I. Historical Background

Ancient Lugdunum, once a Celtic place of worship of some renown,[1] gained considerably in importance with the beginning of the Roman era in Gaul. During the Gallic wars it was visited by Caesar, and, owing to its strategic location "le camp du Confluent" (i.e., of the Rhône and Saône) soon became a Roman supply depot and command centre. In 43 B.C. the Roman government formally acknowledged Lugdunum's importance when Munatius Plancus founded by decree of the Roman senate the Colonia Copia Felix Munatia Lugdunum. Six years later (37 B.C.) Agrippa mapped out Roman military and supply routes, making the city, whose emblem was the horn of abundance, the centre of the Roman road system in Gaul.[2] The years 16-13 B.C. saw Augustus stay in Lugdunum for longer periods during his travels, and, on his orders, the city itself was raised to the status of capital of the Roman province of Gallia Lugdunensis.[3] The year 12 B.C.(?)[4] brought new importance and prestige. On 1st August Drusus, the son-in-law of Augustus, established the ara Romae et Augusti ad confluentem as the centre of the official Imperial Cult of the Tres Galliae, thus making the pagus Condatensis by Lugdunum the meeting place of the concilium Galliarum.[5]

The Roman character of Lugdunum soon became very visible in its life-style and buildings, so much so, that one can justifiably follow A. Audin in calling Lugdunum "un miroir de Rome." Hand in hand with the

city's importance as a centre of romanization in Gaul went its economic predominance in the Roman west, not only as a trading centre but also as the location of the Imperial mint.[6] Ever since Augustus visits there, Lugdunum had been very close to the various Imperial administrations. It was the birthplace of the emperor Claudius, and had the honour to be visited by many of the emperors, among them Gaius; Claudius himself renamed the town Colonia Copia Claudia Augusta Lugdunum in 43/44 A.D. In the war of succession of 68-69 A.D. Lugdunum had the good sense to support the right party. It nevertheless had its share of trouble, mostly with its neighbour Vienne, and was ravaged by a disastrous fire in 65 A.D., yet continued to prosper greatly long into the second century A.D. The first signs of decline became evident at the time of empire-wide crisis under Marcus Aurelius and intensified with the revolt of Albinus in 197 A.D.; the city never fully recovered, at least in the Roman era, from the subsequent siege and conquest by Septimius Severus and his followers.

II. Sources

Study of the events of 177 A.D. at Lugdunum has always been hampered by the lack of first-hand material. Our main source, the letter of the Christians at Lugdunum and Vienne to their Asian brethren (Eusebius,[7] Historia Ecclesiae, 5.1-3), suffers from the fact that it is often ambiguous, substitutes description for analysis and, above all, was not written by an unaffected party. Although now generally considered a "good" source,[8] the letter alone is insufficient for adequate documentation of the events, and so we have to turn to other sources for

additional information. Most of these are ecclesiastical,[9] and, as such, must be examined for bias. Nevertheless, a good deal of information on both the external and internal situation of the Church at that time can be gleaned from the apologists, who were very active in the second half of the second century A.D., and to their information can be added the various Acta Sanctorum.[10] Such data as we can gather from the religious writers must further be compared with what the secular authors tell us. The most important among these are the Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Dio Cassius, Marcus Aurelius, Fronto and, not least, all authors who wrote on legal topics (i.e., the Digest).

In addition to the literary evidence, the study of the persecution at Lugdunum depends heavily on epigraphical and archeological material; indeed, it is from these fields of research that we can expect the most important ideas and contributions in the future. Of chief importance is volume 13 of the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum with its wealth of epigraphical material concerning all aspects of life in ancient Lugdunum; this complements the earlier work of A. Allmer & P. Dissard, Musée de Lyon, Inscriptions Antiques, and has been followed in recent years by M. P. Wuilleumier's Inscriptions Latines des Trois Gaules, 17e supplément à Gallia, CNRS (1963). In the field of archeology there are the publications of numerous classical scholars, first and foremost, A. Audin of Lyon, who can boast a formidable record of archeological discoveries, studies and publications, also those of such other eminent scholars as J. Guey and M. Leglay. But different lines of inquiry are also relevant: "Historians of the Roman empire, Roman lawyers, ecclesiastical historians, Christian theologians, students of Greek and

Roman religion"[11] all have approached the problem of the persecution of Christians, particularly that at Lugdunum, from the perspective of their various disciplines.[12] In the formidable scholarship their research has produced, one can observe two distinct periods of publication, the first around 1915, and the second one after the publication of Oliver and Palmer's article on the aes Italicense in 1955.[13] The present discussion draws mostly on the publications of the second period, since to cover all material on the topic would be neither possible nor practical within the scope of this study. Even among these publications there are different approaches and opinions, so that it is hardly surprising that theories and interpretations should vary greatly. In practice one has to contend with the frequent division of scholars into "camps,"[14] the occasional stereotyping of historical figures and occurrences and, above all, the publication of papers on the subject which show too much divergence from generally accepted facts as a result of either the author's bias or improper research.[15]

This thesis aims to study the events of 177 A.D. at Lugdunum on the basis of the ancient sources and in the light of the most modern scholarship. Whenever possible, I hope to introduce new ideas and interpretations in order to arrive at new conclusions about this very important, yet puzzling, chapter of Roman and Church history.

NOTES

[1]The following two paragraphs are largely dependent upon the arguments of Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, except where noted. See also J.-L. Bernard, Histoire Secrète de Lyon et du Lyonnais (Paris, 1977) 67.

[2]OCD, 625.

[3]R. Chevallier, "Gallia Lugdunensis," ANRW II.3 (1975) 938.

[4]For the alternate date of 10 B.C. see C. Simpson, Six Studies in Early Roman History (Diss. Edmonton, 1978) 8-21.

[5]M. Krascheninnikoff, "Über die Einführung des provincialen Kaisercultus im römischen Westen," Philologus 53 (1894) 169 states that the concilium precedes the prov. cult.

[6]OCD, 625.

[7]T. D. Barnes, "Eusebius and the Date of the Martyrdoms," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 139 cautions that Eusebius did not know too much about the Church in the west.

[8]D. Berwig, Marc Aurel und die Christen (Diss. München, 1970) 69f.

[9]Berwig, Marc Aurel und die Christen, 1 (Tertullian, Athenagoras, Justin Martyr).

[10]J. Molthagen, Der römische Staat und die Christen im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert (Hypomnemata 10; Göttingen, 1975) 35 cautions against too much trust in these documents.

[11]G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" P&P 26 (1963) 6.

[12]Cf. R. Chevallier's thorough bibliography on all topics relevant to the study of the history of the Tres Galliae (above, note 3).

[13]J. Oliver and R. Palmer, "Minutes of an Act of the Roman Senate," Hesperia 24 (1955) 327-343.

[14]J. Vogt, "Die Sklaven und die unteren Schichten im frühen Christentum," Gymnasium 87 (1980) 437. Cf. A. N. Sherwin-White, "The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again," JThS NS. 3 (1952) 200f.

[15] E.g.: scholars like J. W. Thompson, who, *a priori*, deny flatly that Marcus Aurelius could have had anything to do with the persecution of Christians. See "The Alleged Persecution of Christians at Lyons in 177," AJTh 16 (1912) 359-384; 17 (1913) 248-258.

CHAPTER 1

IMPERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

This chapter examines the role of the emperor(s) and the provincial administration in Gaul in the persecution at Lugdunum; at the same time it will attempt to determine whether this persecution was part of a systematic policy of persecution under Marcus Aurelius or only a chance occurrence.

A. Marcus Aurelius

Our first step in the examination of the events at Lugdunum in 177 must be to study the man Marcus Aurelius;[1] this is in order to ascertain whether there existed any particular influence in his raising, education and religious-philosophical outlook, which would have destined him to be a persecutor of the Church. Within this study we must include Marcus' witness about himself, as well as that of contemporary writers. To improve our understanding of his actions we must further consider his health, his alleged addiction to opium, and finally briefly review the events of the years preceding 177 which are likely to have had a bearing on his attitudes.

1. Education:

Having been born in 121 A.D. into a consular family of Spanish origin, the young Marcus, his chaste and moderate character well known, soon received special honours from the emperor; Hadrian made him Salian priest at the age of eight and personally arranged for him to be taught by the best teachers of his time,[2] among them Diognetus, Q. Junius Rusticus, Sextus, Alexander the Grammarian, Fronto, Catulus, Claudius Severus and Claudius Maximus.[3] The most important of these for present purposes is Fronto, whose intimate friendship with Marcus as both teacher and advisor is well attested in the correspondence of both men. While Fronto's main impact as a teacher of language and rhetoric was to instill in Marcus the ability to express his thoughts with style and eloquence, it is conceivable that, beyond this, he also influenced Marcus with his ideas--ideas like those expressed in his outspoken attacks against the Christians.[4] Some of these thoughts may well have stayed with Marcus,[5] who himself in book eleven of the Meditations makes a scathing remark on the Christians.[6] It is, however, important to point out that, from the time of Marcus' 'conversion' to philosophy, Fronto's influence on Marcus decreased and never regained its former strength.[7]

Another facet of Marcus' education, one which is of paramount importance for the understanding of Marcus as a human being and of his role in the persecution at Lugdunum, is his extensive training in law. This training was started and furthered by Marcus' adoptive father. Marcus kept it up, and devoted much time to it for the rest of his life.[8] In letters of the young Marcus to his teacher Fronto, we hear of long hours spent in the law-courts and of large amounts of imperial

correspondence written by the young prince.[9] Marcus soon came to love the practice of the law, a love which impressed upon him the realization that a man's judgments are correct only if he takes the task seriously, works diligently at it,[10] hears both sides and, above all, is a compassionate judge.[11] Marcus' love for justice[12] resulted in the creation of new laws,[13] long hours spent researching cases[14] and in various changes, innovations and improvements in the legislative process.

2. Religious and Philosophical Thought:

Evidence in the Meditations suggests that Marcus can safely be called a religious person. As a Roman, as a Salian priest and as an emperor, he participated in the official cults of the state, and indeed led the worship on occasion. Furthermore, his role as head of state made it necessary for him to pay his respect to imported cults.[15] Marcus, together with Commodus, was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries and was interested in other non-Roman religions as well.[16] In many respects Marcus' dedication to the ideals of Stoic philosophy superseded and widened the precepts of conventional Roman religion. Privately, he tended to believe in one universal god,[17] and held that religion must influence one's morals and actions.[18] Some of Marcus' beliefs are even identical to Christian dogma. Hence it is not surprising that so many Christian writers express such high regard for this emperor.[19] Indeed, in condemning a man whose principles were so highly regarded by his contemporaries, the Christians would only have hurt their own credibility in the public eye and have invited the reproach of all well-meaning men.[20]

In Marcus' own writings, and those of his contemporaries, we see a man who is seeking to demonstrate his humanity whenever possible. He dislikes the bloody circus shows, wants to reign without shedding the blood of senators, even extends mercy to those who conspired with Cassius, whose severed head he refuses to view.

Yet despite his personal religious and philosophical convictions, one repeatedly notices the other Marcus as well: the Marcus who is "more Roman than philosopher,"[21] and who caused heavy loss of life in his actions to protect the Roman way-of-life. These actions must be seen as forced upon Marcus by his office.[22] On the whole, however, he seems to have handled all situations as humanely as possible.

3. Health and Habits:

Health problems caused Marcus steady concern and discomfort. He was plagued by pain, sleeplessness and the inability to take food. Military campaigns and camp-life added to his problems, which were further compounded by reports of military and family trouble. In later years his health must have deteriorated rapidly. We have the witness of Marcus himself as well as that of contemporaries, in which he is described as a sick and aged man.[23] It has been speculated that reports of his failing health prompted Cassius to make an attempt on the highest office in the state.[24]

Marcus' health problems were compounded by regular doses of a concoction called 'mandragora,'[25] which was taken by the emperor to alleviate his health problems and the stresses of campaign-life. Instead, it created more problems for him, especially when he tried to stop taking

it. Modern scholars have identified a large part of this substance as opium, and have concluded that Marcus was suffering the effects of opium addiction and, at times, the signs of opium withdrawal.[26] They attribute to this circumstance not only many of the gloomy and incomprehensible statements in the Meditations,[27] but also indicate that it made Marcus a lethargic and inactive person.[28] Indeed, some postulate that the fact that the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis went unpunished and unchecked in the face of so many flagrant transgressions of the law is a sign of Marcus' lethargy as emperor.[29]

In addition to his failing health, Marcus had to mourn the deaths of many of his family, the latest being the death of his wife Faustina in Asia Minor in 175 A.D. Henceforth we see Marcus drowning his sorrow in the pursuit of philosophy, spending long periods of time in talk with philosophers, both on his journey home from Egypt (175 A.D.), and during his final stay in Rome.[30]

One may therefore conclude that it is possible to detect only little in Marcus' education, and nothing in his character and convictions that would have prompted him to become a persecutor of the Church.[31] This, however, is not to say that a 'good, religious' man might not persecute the Christians worse than a bad one, or at least close his eyes to the illegal persecution of Christians. Nearly two centuries later, for instance, the philosopher emperor Julian, who, like Marcus, loathed open violence and bloodshed, took the latter course by failing to prosecute the murderers of Christians.[32] However that may be, one has to realize that Marcus' ability to keep abreast of the events of the day must have suffered from the manifold problems he was experiencing at the

time. The events surrounding the persecution at Lugdunum quite possibly afford an indication of that.

B. The Emperor and the Christians

Next a study of Marcus' relationship to the Christians in his official capacity as emperor. Included here will be a discussion of the legal materials and precedents which Marcus had available to guide him in the treatment of the Christians, as well as Marcus' own contributions to this topic. Undoubtedly the most important among all of these is the senatus consultum de precibus minuendis (found on the aes Italicense), which many have cited as the enactment which triggered the persecution.[33] This document will therefore be given special emphasis. We must also discuss the rescript to the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, its authorship, legal points, and meaning in the light of the senatus consultum.

1. Legal Precedent:

Some scholars consider the institutum Neronianum to be the oldest legal enactment against the Christians.[34] The only problem with this idea is the fact that Tertullian alone uses that term,[35] without, however, specifying whether it was a general edict, or came in the form of a mandatum or even of an unofficial memorandum. Nor does he state to whom it was directed, and who was bound by it, whether it was general or local only. Nero certainly persecuted the Christians, but we know precious little about any legal basis for his actions.[36] In any event, it is likely enough that the condemnatio memoriae of Nero's name would

have included any existing edicts against the Christians.[37] The most important 'contribution' of Nero to the persecution and hatred which the Christians suffered, one which lasted into the days of Marcus and longer, was his success in associating their name with incendiarism, odium humani generis, and the spreading of death and destruction both for Rome in particular and human civilization in general.[38]

Passing over the era of the Domitianic persecutions for lack of conclusive sources,[39] we next hear about the persecution of Christians under the emperor Trajan. Pliny had encountered problems with the Christians, and claiming ignorance of the customary processes against them, he wrote to ask the emperor's advice; though even before writing to Caesar he had already sent a number of non-Roman Christians to their deaths, whether on account of the nomen or for specific flagitia is uncertain. In order to justify his actions to himself (since, upon inquiry, he was unable to find any factual basis for the flagitia accusations),[40] Pliny seizes upon the Christians' stubbornness as a reason for his actions. If a high Roman official claims ignorance of how to treat the Christians, it seems obvious that, even if clear instructions for dealing with the Christians had once existed, they must have been abolished or fallen into disuse before Pliny's time. Hence the importance of Trajan's answer as a novel ruling on the Christian question. His regulation still leaves in doubt the issue of persecution because of the nomen or the flagitia but at least Trajan states that the Christians conquirendi non sunt, and that accusations must take a formal legal form. Whatever its shortcomings, this rescript became the legal basis for the treatment of Christians for the following decades.[41]

Hadrian, the restorer of temples and supporter of Roman religion, was the next emperor to leave us a significant document on the treatment of Christians (HE 4.8.6). Again it is in the form of a rescript, "perhaps the only form in which emperors made legal pronouncements about the Christians."[42] Once more the province where trouble was brewing was Asia. The emperor, very much in the spirit of Trajan, answered that accusations must receive formal legal treatment, adding that mere slanderers must be prosecuted by process of cognitio.[43] Our only other evidence is in the Apologia of Melito who mentions letters of the emperor Antoninus Pius advising some Greek cities not to take unlawful action against the Christians[44] (HE 4.26.10). Beyond this remark we have no further legal documents on how to deal with the Christians prior to the era of Marcus.

2. Marcus on the Christians:

Marcus apparently did not write much on the Christians per se. In the Meditations there is only one reference to the Christians, a critical reference to their inflexible stubbornness (11.3). In an early letter of Marcus to Fronto there is a short word about a consul, Acilius Glabrio, who later became a Christian, but Marcus does not want to discuss Glabrio's case, and asks his tutor for a new topic.[45] Otherwise we possess two apocryphal letters of Marcus. In one he summons the bishop Abercius of Hierapolis to Rome to perform various miracles, and in the other he writes to the senate telling the patres about the rain-miracle in the land of the Quadi, proposing the death penalty for anyone who accuses the Christians.[46] Were it possible to prove that these two

letters came from the pen of Marcus, we would have an excellent means of explaining the alleged two periods of persecution under Marcus. In that case the first period would have ended with the publication of these letters, leading to the persecution-free middle years of Marcus' reign. The resumption of the persecutions could then be blamed on either a change of heart by Marcus just before or after the death of Verus, or, more likely, on Marcus' ill-health and the resulting take-over by Commodus of the decision-making concerning the Christians. However, as both of these letters have not been clearly identified as genuine, the lack of a definite statement on the Christians by Marcus is self-evident. We must therefore look to other documents which have been attributed to Marcus and certainly led to repeated persecutions during his reign.[47]

3. Kaina dogmata:

In his apology (176 A.D.), Melito alludes to kaina dogmata enacted during Marcus' reign and used against the Christians (HE 4.26.5). He then proceeds to inquire of Caesar whether they came from him or from another source; if the latter, he asks Caesar to stop their implementation. Unfortunately, our sources leave us woefully ignorant of the substance of these decrees and, despite intensive research into their nature, all one can do ultimately is make educated guesses. Obviously if these decrees were directed against the Christians, they may well have been lost. They may, however, have been of a more general nature, and some attempts have been made to identify them. To repeat every theory would be beyond the scope of the present discussion, but it will be appropriate to give here a short review of the various decrees identified as the kaina dogmata by

different authors. From these one must choose the regulation most likely to have influenced the happenings at Lugdunum, and discuss it in more detail. The decrees that could qualify as kaina dogmata are the following:

Dig. 48.19.30

Si quis aliquid fecerit, quo leves hominum animi superstitione numinis terrentur, divus Marcus huiusmodi homines in insulam relegari rescripsit.

Sententiae 5.21.2

Qui novas et usu vel ratione incognitas religiones inducunt, ex quibus animi hominum moveantur, honestiores deportantur, humiliores capite puniuntur.

A third decree, which strengthens the two preceding ones, is mentioned in Ulpian De Officio Proconsulis bk. 7 and repeated by Marcian.

Dig. 48.13.4.2

Nam et sacrilegos, latrones, plagiarios, fures conquirere debet et prout quisque deliquerit in eum animadvertere, receptoresque eorum coercere, sine quibus latro diutius latere non potest.

It is possible that any or all of these decrees, though not especially directed against the Christians, as most scholars agree, could nevertheless be turned against them by people who considered them hostes publici, and in whose material interest it was to prosecute the Christians through the cognitio process.

An idea that has found wider acceptance is to identify the kaina dogmata of Melito with the senatus consultum de precibus minuendis, found on the bronze-tablet from Italica, Spain and on a marble from

Sardis.[48] As many scholars have recognised, this law was widely publicised and could have been potentially much more dangerous to any accused Christian than any of the decrees mentioned before; for it promised financial savings to those who could find suitable condemnati to be used as gladiators or trinqui.[49] The aes Italicense, moreover, is the only document making reference to the situation in the Three Gauls (and hence indirectly to Lugdunum) specifically, and therefore of paramount importance for our discussion;[50] for it extends to the Tres Galliae the privilege (veteri more et sacro ritu) of purchasing condemned people as gladiators who then could be used as trinqui[51] (i.e., victims on whom the performance of most cruel Gallic religious rites, outlawed for ca. 200 years, would once again be legal).[52] If several of the Christians were used as trinqui, as seems to be the case (lines 282-86, 370, 406, 424-27),[53] we would have clear evidence that this law was employed in the persecutions of 177.

What we have before us, then, is a decree which may or may not be among the kaina dogmata, but which nevertheless came directly from the Imperial administration, and hence could not have been published without the emperor's permission. Everything suggests that the idea for this decree was conceived during Marcus' journeys in the Near East (175/76 A.D.).[54] Gaul, the bulwark against Germany, was then in great economic difficulties and in danger of attack from Moorish tribes through Spain and Germanic tribes from the north. Hence the need to placate the Gauls, in order to retain their loyalty, a consideration that has been seen as the decisive element in Marcus' decision.[55] That Marcus had originally expressed his displeasure with the idea of the senatus

consultum is a known fact.[56] Whether or not he foresaw the disastrous results of the decree in the persecutions at Lugdunum is not attested. Oliver and Palmer believe he did not,[57] and it is true that Marcus' qualms concerned mostly the cruelty of the act. But a mind so well trained in legal matters could hardly have overlooked the possibility of abuses, not unless his health and ability to concentrate were impaired at the time, as could well have been the case. Furthermore, it appears that in this instance a man who once had stood up to his armies and even refused them a donative[58] showed considerably less stamina and gave in to the requests of the Gallic lobby rather prematurely.

Be that as it may, the senatus consultum engraved in the aes Italicense turned out to be a disaster not just on humanitarian grounds, but because it must have severely disturbed the trust of the Christians in the Roman state and its leaders. Whether it is to be identified with the kaina dogmata of Melito can remain open. The decree is in any event the most important legal document of Marcus against the Christians, and it is against this background that one must see not only the rounding up of Christians into the amphitheatre at Lugdunum, but also the Imperial rescript to the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis.

4. The Rescript:

We have seen that the emperor's will in the matter of the Christians customarily found expression through rescripts.[59] Being a legal document, the rescript was by its nature not a haphazard letter written thoughtlessly on the spur of the moment, but rather a well thought-out piece of legislation. Marcus, in particular, a man who not

only loved the law but also was well trained in it, never treated rescripts lightly,[60] but carefully consulted the members of his council before he composed an answer, even delegating judicial matters to the senate on occasion.[61] There is also the distinct possibility of direct participation by Commodus. Marcus, who as a youth had had to answer numerous pieces of formal Imperial correspondence himself, will undoubtedly have followed the same practice in the training of Commodus. Indeed, Commodus shows up as the co-author of a rescript,[62] and it is likely enough that by 177 A.D., as co-emperor with equal rights, he will have had some practice in writing his own rescripts. This line of argument takes us directly to the question of who was responsible for the rescript.

The author of the rescript in the Historia Ecclesiae is named simply 'the emperor' (line 331)--evidently an anachronism if one considers that previous documents bear the signatures of both emperors. To avoid the difficulty it has been taken for granted that, when Eusebius speaks of the 'emperor,' he really means Marcus. But the point has only been assumed, never proved; in fact, no attempt at proof, whether through literary or other evidence, seems ever to have been made. The assumption that Marcus was responsible leads to various problems. How can a rescript which apparently used such unconventional terminology and is so contrary to humanitarian ideals be the work of the philosopher-emperor?[63] Presumably the governor, in accordance with precedent, will have asked how to handle the persecution in general, and in particular, how to treat the Roman citizens.[64] The vague answer of the rescript is: torture them to death (the meaning of tympanizo[65] is to crucify, cudgel, or generally torture to death, never to behead, the customary punishment

for Roman citizens), and let the others (i.e., the apostates) go (lines 331-33). Quite apart from the fact that an order to torture people to death is not in the spirit of Marcus, such a directive in a rescript is outrageous, for it makes the use of Roman citizens as trinqui possible. That Marcus, no matter what his health was like, could have made so monumental and catastrophic a blunder is quite incomprehensible.

In view of all this the alternative possibility seems well worth consideration, namely, that the less experienced partner in the rule, Commodus, had a greater role in writing this rescript than has been generally believed. Given that Marcus was quite old, sick and otherwise busy at that time, Commodus[66] might even have written it completely on his own,[67] thereby gaining experience for a time when Marcus would not be there.

Post eventum realization of the implications and the size of the disaster quite likely will have caused the senatus consultum to be suspended. At all events, an inscription shows that by the second quarter of the third century A.D. a priest of the Three Gauls was again paying an enormous sum for the games out of his own pocket[68] (CIL 13, 3162).

5. Persecution under Marcus Aurelius:

There appear to have been two waves of persecution under Marcus,[69] the first falling in the years 167-68 A.D., the second in 177 A.D. That Christians were in fact hunted out at those times is evident from the combined evidence of contemporary ecclesiastical and secular writers.[70] The reason for the first wave of persecutions was

the call for general sacrifices to the gods throughout the whole empire (including numerous lectisternia)[71] in order to avert wars and the plague.[72] When the Christians did not participate, they gave the impression of being uninterested in the well-being of the public and hence were persecuted. The second wave, the apologists tell us, appears to have been based on the kaina dogmata.

In conclusion, it should be noted that both the ancient sources and the modern authors agree that none of the extant decrees of Marcus were directed against the Christians per se. They seem to be, rather, the unfortunate outcome of Roman attempts to avert war, plague and economic disaster. While it follows that the persecutions under Marcus were not a concerted pogrom against the Christians, it must nonetheless be stressed that Marcus is still responsible for the policies of his government and their results, just as modern leaders of government are responsible for the actions of their subordinates.[73] On the other hand, Marcus' guilt is somewhat mitigated by his bad physical and strained mental condition.

C. The Role of the Provincial Governor

A preliminary inquiry into the governor's background brings the discussion to another crucial problem: why did he embark upon persecution? More particularly, did the governor stay within or overstep legal bounds in his treatment of the Christians? Finally, it is imperative to establish which person or party was ultimately responsible for the happenings at Lugdunum.

1. The Governor:

The name of the governor of the Lugdunensis has not survived in any of our sources, and any statement on his family background and ethnic origin is pure speculation. All we know is that he took great liberties in his handling of the affairs, liberties which, some scholars believe, another governor would never have dared to take.[74] On the other hand, we know of no case in which a governor was punished for any actions taken against the Christians.[75] It may therefore be the case that, thanks to Marcus' laxity and fading interest in ruling, along with the youth and inexperience of Commodus, the governor was free to act according to his own whims.

2. Legal Actions against the Christians:

The letter of the Church tells us that the governor was reminded in the rescript to follow, at least in part, the well-known principles of Trajan in the treatment of the Christians, as these principles were in line with the ideas of the Imperial government[76] (lines 331-33). Yet not only did the governor fail to fully comply with his orders, but along the way he also violated laws and traditions fundamental to Roman society, in particular the mos maiorum as it applied to the treatment of citizens anywhere in the empire (lines 366-67).

After the start of the persecution by the tribune and the chief authorities of Lugdunum, the incarcerated Christians were kept until the arrival of the governor (lines 34-35) who apparently returned fairly quickly. Of his characteristics, the most shocking is his great personal cruelty, evident through his own actions and the outrages which

he permitted others to commit against the Christians (line 37). He seems to have been equally contemptuous of the law. Some Christians, it seems, were not allowed to defend themselves properly (lines 46-53); apostates were kept in prison and made to suffer the same treatment as those who confessed their faith (lines 227-30); even the heathen slaves of Christian masters were incarcerated and, under torture, forced to testify against their masters, clearly an outlawed practice[77] (lines 81-90). Then, contrary to the orders which he received and in violation of tradition, he brought the apostates back in front of the tribunal together with the confessi (lines 330-31). After condemning the non-citizens to be thrown to the beasts and the citizens to be beheaded (lines 338-40), he nevertheless kept aside Attalus, a prominent Roman citizen of Lugdunum, to be thrown to the beasts after renewed torture (lines 366-77). The only argument in mitigation of the governor's treatment of the Christians is that many of them, possibly citizens and known as such to the prosecutors, refused to say so themselves. When asked for patria, citizenship and name, they answered only "Christianus sum" (lines 137, 363), thus presenting themselves as citizens not of Rome, which they despised, but of another kingdom.[78]

3. Accusations against the Christians:

At this point it is necessary to note the formal accusations made against the Christians by agents of the provincial government. The question here is whether the accusations were based on genuine points of law, or served as pretexts to hide other underlying reasons.

At Lugdunum the Christians, after initially having suffered

violence at the hands of the mob (lines 27-32), were "indicted and confessed" (to be Christians) before the chief authorities of the city (line 34). It would appear, therefore, that they were at first persecuted because of the nomen Christianum. Whether persecution because of the nomen was permitted or not in the years of Marcus' joint rule with Commodus is uncertain. Certainly it was prohibited by Antoninus Pius in his letters to the koinon of Asia (HE 4.13.7). Melito made reference to this ruling, noting that Marcus shared his father's opinion in that matter (HE 4.26.11). The governor's actions upon his return seem to bear out Melito's claim, for he appears to have realized immediately that he needed weightier grounds on which to judge the Christians than just the nomen, so he urged on delatores to accuse the Christians of flagitia (lines 81-90). This is the last time in the history of the persecutions in the Roman empire that this accusation is used.[79] Ever since the historic correspondence between Trajan and Pliny, the accusation of flagitia had been exposed as lacking substance and truth. Pliny found no proof of them, Marcus did not believe in them,[80] nor indeed could any thinking person. As an important study of flagitia accusations has shown, the specific crimes mentioned in Lugdunum--cannibalism and Oedipean incest (lines 87-88)--were unbelievable pretexts which almost nobody took seriously.[81] Therefore, throughout the whole process, the flagitia accusations are constantly refuted by the Christians (lines 49-50, 176-78, 375-77). In fact, none of the Christians was at the end convicted of flagitia. So it would seem that they were condemned on account of the nomen (line 231) by a governor whose main interest at that point seems to have been to please the crowd (line 366) and not the legality of his

actions. Only the apostates, who, presumably by accusing the Christians of flagitia, had implicated themselves, were punished on account of them (line 234). It can therefore be safely assumed that neither the governor, nor the people of Lugdunum, were really persecuting the local Church for these ostensible reasons. In fact, the letter of the Church gives us alternate and more reasonable motives for the persecution: to vindicate the pagan gods (lines 429-31) and in order to gain possession of the property of the Christians (line 29). These motives will subsequently be examined in Chapters Two and Three.

We may therefore conclude that the governor persecuted the Christians actively (conquirendo), willfully, illegally, and in contravention of both tradition and the emperor's will. Furthermore, it has become evident that the reasons he gave for persecution were unbelievable, obsolescent, and in fact never used again. They were pretexts for underlying motives which the provincial authority would not, or could not, admit. As a result, the governor and his administration are to be held accountable for their actions and to be considered guilty of spilling Christian blood.

4. Synopsis of the Persecutions of Polycarp, Justin, Ptolemy and Lucius and the Persecution at Lugdunum:

To what extent, then, did the persecution at Lugdunum differ from, or conform to, the general pattern of attacks on Christians under Marcus[82] as illustrated by the other three famous persecutions of his reign?

The persecution at Smyrna which claimed the life of Polycarp (HE 4.14.10-15.47) was, like the persecution at Lugdunum, triggered by

mob violence. Unlike the officials in Lugdunum, however, the proconsul and police captain at Smyrna showed genuine concern for Polycarp. They pointed out that by swearing by the genius of Caesar, pronouncing the words 'Lord Caesar' and sacrificing in front of his cult statue (all actions apparently not required of the Christians at Lugdunum), he would be able to save.his life. It was his failure to do so that caused his death.

The persecution of Justin (HE 4.16.1-9) appears to have been the result of the personal vendetta of the philosopher Crescens who, often defeated by Justin in public debates, sought to rid himself of his adversary. Like the Christians at Lugdunum, Justin seems to have been accused of being a Christian (nomen) and of committing atheistic and impious acts (flagitia). However, it is important to observe that neither the nomen nor the flagitia were the actual cause for persecution, but, rather, the vengeful attitude of the persecutors. This seems to have been the case in Lugdunum as well.

The events surrounding the deaths of Ptolemy and Lucius (HE 4.17.1-13) resemble the actions against Justin very closely, except that in the latter case the persecutors, because of an Imperial decree, were not able to arrest the person they really wanted to punish (a woman who, after becoming a Christian, had for a long time put up with the immoral behaviour of her husband, but, as a result of his latest outrages, was not willing to do so any longer). Therefore, the persecutors turned against Ptolemy, her instructor in Christianity, accusing him of being a Christian (nomen). Lucius reproached them for their attack against a person who had committed no flagitia, an attack

which, in his words, was unworthy not only of the emperors Pius and Marcus, but also of the Roman senate. He was in turn convicted of the nomen, and both he and Ptolemy put to death.

From these instances of persecution one must conclude that not all attacks on Christians under Marcus conform to one clearly defined pattern. It appears, however, that in the majority of cases (including Lugdunum) the persecutors used a combination of nomen and flagitia accusations to condemn the Christians. One may observe that persons who were interested in the condemnation of Christians because of underlying private reasons often enough effected their arrest and conviction because of the nomen. This appears to have been the case not only in the persecution of Justin and that of Ptolemy and Lucius, but at Lugdunum as well.

NOTES

[1]Henceforth 'Marcus.'

[2]OCD, 152.

[3]Meditationes 1.6-15.

[4]Fronto, Ex Octavio Minucii Felicis 9.8.

[5]M. Sordi, "La Ricerca d'Ufficino nel Processo del 177," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 184.

[6]Meditationes 11.3:

> Happy the soul which, at whatever moment the call comes for release from the body, is equally ready to face extinction, dispersion, or survival. Such preparedness, however, must be the outcome of its own decision; a decision not prompted by mere contumacy, as with the Christians, but formed with deliberation and gravity and, if it is to be convincing to others, with an absence of all heroics. (translation by Maxwell Staniforth)

[7]E. Champlin, Fronto and Antonine Rome (Cambridge, 1980) 121.

[8]A. Birley, Marcus Aurelius (London, 1966) 114f.; 169; 178; 180.

[9]E.g.: Ad M.C. 4.7.

[10]Herodian 1.3.1; Dio Cassius, Epitome of 71.1.2 and 62.6.1.

[11]Herodian 1.2.3.

[12]Meditationes 1.14.

[13]R. Klein, "Einleitung," in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 12 mentions Marcus' creation of 320 new laws.

[14]Dio Cassius, Epitome of 62.6.1.

[15]A. Audin, "Cybèle à Lugdunum," Latomus 35 (1976) 61.

[16]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 264 mentions Marcus' discussion with a Jewish rabbi on his journey of the near east (175 A.D.).

[17]Meditationes 7.9.

[18]Meditationes 3.13.

[19]E.g.: Tertullian, Apology 5.6.

[20]Berwig, Marc Aurel und die Christen, 58 speaks about Melito's use of captatio benevolentiae in this context.

[21]G. R. Stanton, "Marc Aurel, Kaiser und Philosoph," in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 377; cf. Meditationes 2.5.

[22]Cf. Meditationes 6.12.

[23]Herodian 1.3.1; Philostratos, Vitae Sophistarum 2.1.

[24]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 254.

[25]E. C. Witke, "Marcus Aurelius and Mandragora," Class. Phil. 60-61 (1965) 23 f.; and T. W. Africa, "The Opium Addiction of Marcus Aurelius," Journal of the History of Ideas 22 (1961) 97-102.

[26]Witke and Africa (above, note 25).

[27]Meditationes 2.17; 8.24; 9.36.

[28]Witke and Africa (above, note 25).

[29]See the articles mentioned in note 25 above and C. B. Phipps, "Persecution under Marcus Aurelius," Hermathena 47 (1932) 169.

[30]See above, note 23.

[31]Phipps (above, note 29) 167.

[32]Ammianus Marcellinus 22.11.9-11.

[33]P. Keresztes, "War Marc Aurel ein Christenverfolger?" in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 295-98.

[34]Molthagen, Der römische Staat und die Christen im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert, 25f.; et al.

[35]L. F. Janssen, "Superstitio and the Persecution of Christians," Vigiliae Christianae 33 (1979) 131.

[36]T. D. Barnes, "Legislation against the Christians," JRS 58 (1968) 35 believes that the inst. Ner. has no bearing on the legality of subsequent persecutions.

[37]P. Keresztes, "The Imperial Roman Government and the Christian Church: From Nero to the Severi," ANRW II.23.1 (1979) 282; Sherwin-White (above, 'Introduction,' note 14) 201 states that damnatio memoriae caused laws and edicts to die with their authors.

[38]For an excellent discussion of these charges see Janssen (above, note 35).

[39]Cf. Lactantius, On the Deaths of the Persecutors, chapter 3--Lucius Caecilius to Donatus the Confessor.

[40]Cf. Pliny, Epistulae 10.96 & 97.

[41]Barnes (above, note 36) 48. Note that while Pliny mentions that some Christians ceased to meet after an edict banning hetairiae, the charge of maiestas had not yet been laid in the case of any Christian; nor had any Roman Christian yet been killed, though several had been referred to Rome.

[42]So F. Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World (London, 1977) 558ff.

[43]Ulpian in bk. 7 of De officio proconsulis collected rescripts of the emperors on the Christians (or so we are told by Lactantius). We find the text of the rescript mentioned here appended to Justin 1. Apology.

[44]Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World, 559f.

[45]Why Marcus did not want to discuss his actions and fate is unclear; cf. Ad M.C. 5.22(37) and 5.23(38).

[46]M. Cornelius Fronto (Loeb Class. Lib.) vol. 2, 298-305: Marcus to Euxenianus Publio (found also in Migne's Patr. Graec. vol. 115, p. 1211) and A Letter of the Emperor Marcus to the Senate (appended to Justin, 1. Apology).

[47]Q.v. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiae 4.15-17; 5.1-3.

[48]Sardis was the home town of Bishop Melito. For the complete text (with translation) of these documents, see Oliver & Palmer (above, 'Introduction,' note 13).

[49]E.g.: P. Keresztes, D. Berwig et al.

[50]The religious and economic implications of the senatus consultum will be discussed in the following chapters.

[51]Keresztes (above, note 37) 302.

[52]W. O. Moeller, "The trinqui and the Martyrs of Lyon," Historia 21 (1972) 127.

[53]Line numbers refer to appendix 1.

[54]Oliver & Palmer (above, 'Introduction,' note 13) 326.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Oliver & Palmer (above, 'Introduction,' note 13) 330f; text of the aes Italicense 3-4, 24-26.

[57]Oliver & Palmer (above, 'Introduction,' note 13) 326.

[58]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 230. Marcus refused the donative on the ground that it would be wrung from the blood of the soldiers' relatives.

[59]Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World, 556.

[60]W. Kunkel, "Die Funktion des Konsiliums in der magistratischen Strafjustiz und im Kaisergericht," ZRG 85 (1968) 254-85.

[61]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 180.

[62]Cf. the 'tabula of Banasa,' W. Seston & M. Euzennat, "La Citoyenneté romaine au temps de Marc Aurèle et de Commode d'après la 'tabula Banasitana,'" CRAI (1961) 317-23, and "Un Dossier de la Chancellerie romaine, la 'tabula Banasitana.' Etude de Diplomatique," CRAI (1971) 468-90 (ed. 1972); A. N. Sherwin-White, "Die 'tabula von Banasa' und die 'constitutio Antoniniana,'" in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 429-58.

[63]Note that while we may not have all of the rescript (J. Speigl, Der römische Staat und die Christen [Amsterdam, 1970] 179f.), and that its rendition in the HE may be unobjective, it is our only source and must therefore be accepted as a working copy, fairly close to the original which must have been rather well-known, maybe even published.

[64]Speigl, Der röm. Staat und die Christen, 181.

[65]This is the term used in the rescript to describe the type of punishment the Christians were to receive. See H. Liddell & R. Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, 1978) s.v. tympanizo.

[66]The fact that Commodus was received into all the priestly colleges in 175 and, according to J. E. Sandys, Latin Epigraphy (Groningen, 1889) 245f. was also pontifex maximus (the first heir apparent to be made P.M.), lends support to this thesis since all previous writers of rescripts concerning the Christians had been pontifices maximi.

[67]To judge from the rescripts of Trajan and Hadrian, this would not have been too hard a task for the younger partner in the rule.

[68]J. F. Drinkwater, "A Note on Local Careers in the Three Gauls under the Early Empire," Britannia 10 (1979) 89ff.; D. Fishwick, "The Provincial Priesthood of Titus Sennius Sollemnis," Historia 25 (1976) 124-28; H. G. Pflaum, Le Marbre de Thorigny (Bibl. de l'École des hautes études, Sc. hist. et philol. 292; Paris, 1948).

[69]Keresztes (above, note 33) 285.

[70]E.g.: Justin, 1. Apology 4; Athenagoras, Embassy 1; excerpts of Celsus, Alethes Logos in Origen, Against Celsus 1.8; 8.69.

[71]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 204f.

[72]Keresztes (above, note 33) 288; SHA, Marcus 13.

[73]Cf. the apologist Athenagoras' complaint that Marcus was permitting too many abuses of the Christians (Embassy 1.3).

[74]E.g.: J. Colin, L'Empire des Antonins et les Martyrs Gaulois de 177 (Antiquitas 10; Bonn, 1964) 20 believes that the governor belonged to the Imperial family.

[75]P. Keresztes, "Das Christenmassaker von Lugdunum," in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 271.

[76]W. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Oxford, 1965) 8.

[77]J. Scheele, Zur Rolle der Unfreien in den römischen Christenverfolgungen (Diss. Tübingen, 1970) 123f. For a prohibition to force slaves to testify against their masters see: Paul. Sent. 5.16.4 & 5. See also P. A. Brunt, "Marcus Aurelius and the Christians," in Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History I (Latomus 164; Brussels, 1979) 508f.; W. W. Buckland, The Roman Law of Slavery (The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian) (repr. New York, 1969) 86-88; G. Haertel, "Der Beginn der allgemeinen Krise im Westen des röm. Reiches," in Marc Aurel (Wege der Forschung 550; Darmstadt, 1979) 203.

[78]A. Wlosok, "Die Rechtsgrundlagen der Christenverfolgungen der ersten zwei Jahrhunderte," Gymnasium 66 (1959) 19; Molthagen, Der römische Staat und die Christen im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert, 33; C. Jullian, "Quelques Remarques sur la Lettre des Chrétiens de Lyon," REA 13 (1911) 322:

> Qu'on songe a tout ce que le mot de nomen eveillait de pensées chez le citoyen d'une cité antique. Nomen Romanum, nomen gentilice, nom personnel, tous disparaissent pour le Chrétien devant ce seul nom, Christianus sum.

[79]A. N. Sherwin-White, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" P&P 27 (1964) 25.

[80]Sordi (above, note 5) 180.

[81]W. Schäfke, "Frühchristlicher Widerstand," ANRW II.23.1 (1979) 584; Janssen (above, note 35) 154.

[82]Note that Lactantius in De Mortibus Persecutorum has nothing to say about Marcus.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE PERSECUTION AT LUGDUNUM 177 A.D.

One of the reasons which the letter of the Church offers for the events at Lugdunum is the people's desire "to vindicate their gods" (line 221). In analysing this statement we have to look into the roles played by the Imperial Cult and other non-Christian religions, as well as the background and nature of the Christian community in Lugdunum.[1] Since the punishment of the Christians coincided with at least one religious festival, it will be important to determine and interpret the dates of both the outbreak of the persecution and its culmination in the amphitheatre at Lugdunum.

A. Religions in Lugdunum

1a. <u>The Federal Cult of the Tres Galliae</u>:

The most important cult at Lugdunum was the worship of the Roman emperor by the Three Gauls. Discussion must therefore begin with an outline of the historical development and nature of the Imperial religion from its beginnings down to the time of the persecution.

Some historians of Lugdunum assert that in the pre-Roman era the city was a renowned centre of worship of the Gallic divinity 'Lug.'[2] This fact itself, and the idea that Augustus was building on such a cult

when the altar of the Three Gauls was formally established by Drusus in 12(?) B.C.,[3] "remains to be proved."[4] What seems clear is that the Federal Cult of Roma and Augustus, served by a sacerdos and originally centered on the ara Romae et Augusti,[5] was modeled on provincial cults of Roma and Augustus previously sanctioned in the eastern half of the empire (Suet. Aug. 52). With its yearly festivities commencing on 1st August (an important date in the career of Augustus)[6] as part of the meeting of the concilium Galliarum, this cult, from its outset, had a political rather than religious purpose:[7] the romanization of a newly annexed area.[8] In addition, our sources give a military reason for the establishment of the cult: to counter the threat of revolt caused by the imposition and collection of the census.[9]

"The history of the provincial cult at Lugdunum divides into three distinct phases corresponding to significant changes in the worship offered by the Three Gauls." The first phase, lasting from 12(?) B.C. to the third decade of the second century A.D., saw the veneration of Roma (basically a non-Roman, eastern goddess) and the Augustus (after the death of Augustus himself each reigning emperor in turn).[10] As in the east, games were held at Lugdunum in conjunction with the cult-festival; here, as elsewhere, they were considered the highpoint of the event.[11] The precinct of the sanctuary, located in the pagus condatensis just outside Lugdunum,[12] was in 19 A.D. enlarged by the building of an amphitheatre.[13] In addition to the customary games and venationes given there, we hear of oratorial contests at which the loser would be punished by being thrown into the nearby Rhone (Suet. Gaius 20).

The second phase of the cult's history, beginning under

Hadrian,[14] and lasting until Septimius Severus' defeat of Clodius Albinus in 197 A.D., was characterized by the inclusion of dead emperors and members of their families as divi (divae), a development to be explained by the need of the Antonines to legitimize their claim to the throne and establish an Imperial pedigree. A significant feature of this reform was the construction of a federal temple erected in the precinct in the third decade of the second century; the temple now became the main monument.

As the persecution of the Christians falls into this second period of the cult, the third phase is of no immediate consequence to the present discussion. It is sufficient to note that under the Severi the altar regained its ancient pre-eminence as the centre of a new cult of the Caesares. Thus by the time of Marcus Aurelius the Federal Cult already had a history of almost 200 years. It had fulfilled and continued to fulfil its objectives. To be provincial priest was still a very prestigious, if expensive, office. Yet so long as provincials went through the motions of worshipping the Imperial house, they were free to choose their own life-style and believe in whatever they pleased. Hence "to make a show of reverent loyalty became a normal and customary way of life."

1b. Games and the Imperial Cult:

It has been observed that persecutions most often coincided with celebrations of games, and the persecution at Lugdunum is no exception.[15] To explain these repeated coincidences we must turn to a brief examination of the purpose and nature of the games, as well as

their role within the Imperial Cult.

The close connection between games and the Imperial Cult dates from early in Octavian's career when, having established his power as supreme, he was offered alongside Dea Roma (Suet. Aug. 52) full divine honours by people of the Hellenistic east;[16] these had become so used to paying their respect to extraordinary men in this way, that isotheoi timai including games were accepted as a way of life.[17] By this time games had already undergone a long development from their first attested forms in Minoan and Homeric times through the Hellenistic and Etruscan period down to their final introduction into Roman culture. Their essential cultic nature[18] remained nevertheless unchanged and their purpose could be as varied as to propitiate chthonic gods (in the case of funeral games),[19] to honouring important guests (combined with the worship of the host's deities)[20] or even to serve as fertility rites.[21] The Roman state incorporated games into the cult of the emperor,[22] and at Lugdunum, as elsewhere, these were the highpoint of festivities on such occasions as the emperor's birthday and other Imperial festivals honouring the ruler whether in his presence or absence.[23] The change of games from a participatory to a spectator sport,[24] which had already begun in the Hellenistic east, was continued and accentuated in the Roman era, so that Roman games mirror the games of the Hellenistic period more closely than the earlier Greek ones.[25] While it would be hard to prove total lack of 'sport' in the Roman games, it is clear that other motives take precedence. In the Republican period games were held to foster the military prowess of the youth,[26] but later it became increasingly the practice to punish evildoers or dissenters by ordering them to fight in the arena as

gladiators or with wild beasts. Finally, games became simple entertainment for the masses,[27] offered freely to the populace and regarded as an obligatory gift[28] supplied to the people in return for their worship and loyalty.[29] The games were thus an excellent opportunity for the emperors to display their authority while, at the same time, contributing to the enjoyment of their loyal subjects. In the end they became an indispensable adjunct of the Imperial Cult,[30] so important, in fact, that Marcus, when forced by the Gallic nobles to choose between having no games celebrated at Lugdunum at all (because of the nobles' lack of means for buying gladiators at regular prices) or lowering the prices (and permitting the additional purchase of trinqui), opted for the latter.[31] It will be clear then that the games associated with the ruler cult were ideal occasions for the persecution and punishment of Christians. This was especially the case when Christians refused to worship the emperor, opposed the games themselves as 'tools of the devil,'[32] and were hence perceived (especially in times of war and pestilence) as the culprits who brought the anger of the gods upon the whole nation.[33]

2. Gallic Religion:

For a complete picture of the religious milieu within which the early Christians found themselves, we must now turn to other cults and religions existing alongside the Imperial Cult at Lugdunum.

Thanks to the prohibition of druidic practices and the resulting suppression by the Romans of the old Gallic religion (Suet. Claudius 25.5), we have no real idea of its extent nor any clue to the number of its adherents;[34] one has to make do with what few references

are preserved in the literature of the time (Caesar B.G. 6.18.1; Tac. Hist. 4.54; etc.). Of special importance is the episode of Claudius submersus, Claudius' dumping in the Rhône at Lugdunum (Suet Cl. 9.1; Gaius 20) which has been interpreted as a mimicry of Celtic burial rites.[35] The throwing of the Christians' ashes into the same river[36] (lines 445-46) similarly suggests that in 177 A.D. Gallic religious ideas still survived. Finally, the fact that the use of the trinqui, sacrificial victims used in Gallic religious rites, was once again permitted[37] strengthens A. Audin's thesis of a general return to the Gallic roots at the time.[38]

3. Oriental Cults at Lugdunum:

Of all the oriental cults in Lugdunum, the best attested in the literary, epigraphic and iconographic sources is the cult of Cybele[39] --particularly between 160-208 A.D.[40] Cybele was a goddess who shared a common root with Diana of the Ephesians,[41] and Lugdunum, the "capitale metroaque"[42] along with Vienne had become a stronghold of her cult in the Roman west.[43] Drawing many of its recruits from military personnel[44] who had served in the east, the Cult of Cybele was the natural enemy of Christianity, which recruited its members from much the same social strata.[45] The cult mirrored Christianity in other ways also: in particular, it was a religion of resurrection, and claimed that its members, through undergoing the sprinkling of blood in the 'taurobolic' sacrifice (usually performed about Easter time) were "in aeternum renati."[46] At the same time the cult at Lugdunum had "l'idée d'envahir le culte impérial, d'établier une sorte de symbiose entre la déesse et

la personne même du prince." "Dédaigneuse d'être la protégée de César, Cybèle se prétendit la protectrice de César. Elle prit le nom de Cybèle Auguste."[47] M. Leglay notes[48] that "chaque fois qu'on prie les dieux in honorem domus divinae ou pro salute Imperatoris, c'est à Cybèle qu'on s'adresse. . . ." His point is supported by a large amount of evidence for official taurobolia sacrificed for the emperor (pro reditu, pro victoria, pro salute), for the emperor's wife (mater castrorum) and for the prosperity of the city (pro statu coloniae).[49] The taurobolium itself, the main religious observance of the cult, was a bloody fertility rite of castration and dismemberment, the vires of the sacrificial victim being the cult-object of the greatest importance.[50] In the Christians' view, this was a rite of pollution rather than cleansing.[51]

Other religions at Lugdunum relevant to the discussion are the Cult of Mithras and Judaism. Both of these are known to have been rivals of Christianity,[52] and we must assume that this rivalry was evident in Lugdunum as well. The Cult of Mithras, especially popular with the members of the armed forces,[53] is attested, like the Cult of Cybele,[54] by altars dedicated pro salute imperatoris,[55] and, in Lugdunum, had probably taken firm hold among the members of the local establishment.[56] The most startling of its religious practices was the custom of branding devotees with objects of red-hot iron.[57] As for the Jewish faith, it would appear that during the early years of Christianity the Jews were usually involved whenever and wherever persecution against the Christians arose. This was certainly so in Smyrna (HE 4.15.26-29) and in Ephesus (Acts 19.33),[58] and conceivably could have been the case in Lugdunum, the "nouvelle Ephèse,"[59] as well;[60] however, we do not have any hard

facts to prove Jewish involvement in the persecution.

4. Christianity:

The origin of the Church in Lugdunum can be placed circa 150 A.D.,[61] making the Church at least a quarter of a century old at the time of the persecution. Founded by people old enough to have heard the early Church fathers, this Church was steeped in the apostolic tradition and conservative in outlook.[62] Although in 177 the Council of the Apostles was over 100 years ago (Acts 15.1-29), we still find local Christians clinging to dogmas which were established at that time.[63]

The social and ethnic background of the Christians at Lugdunum will be explored in Chapter Three, but it is important to note here that their Church was caught in the middle between the eastern and the western world. It had strong ties with the east, as the destination of the letter of the Church makes clear, and it included a good number of converts who had come from that part of the empire; but it was also greatly indebted to the sober teaching and influence of the Church at Rome. This is best illustrated by the fact that the Church at Lugdunum, unlike many eastern and more fanatical Churches at the time, did not expel those who had failed to remain steadfast under the pressure of persecution (lines 502-07).

In discussing the nature of the Church at Lugdunum, one must of necessity raise the question of possible Montanist influence in the Church's teaching and behaviour.[64] Conceivably, there were a few individuals with Montanist tendencies at Lugdunum, yet the letter affords us no proof that their opinions were shared by the majority. We hear no

reference to fanatic Montanist teachings, no undue dwelling on the idea of imminent doom (although, as elsewhere in the Early Church, the hope of Christ's return in the near future is expressed here too), no word of the emperor as a tool of Satan, no preaching of the new Jerusalem at Pepuza, no undue preoccupation with prophesy, no indication of any fanatic urge for martyrdom.[65] One must conclude that the Church at Lugdunum, while being vocal and frank about its faith, as the early Churches generally were, placed the greatest emphasis on a "positive imitatio Christi,"[66] rather than on sectarian teachings. It can hardly be called 'Montanist,' therefore.[67] On the contrary, due to its status as a prestigious, sober Church with ties in both the east and the west, it probably occupied the middle ground between the warring factions of Christians at that time.[68]

In light of the above, it is not possible to find an immediate reason for persecution in the Church's behaviour. There remains, however, the fact that its mere existence was perceived as a serious challenge to the beliefs of the rest of the community.

B. The Date of the Persecution

According to the account in Eusebius the persecution at Lugdunum occurred in two instalments (line 318). While we have no definite indication of its beginning, our sources do preserve conflicting information as to the date of its continuation and culmination. The Historia Ecclesiae indicates 1st August as the time when the Christians began to be gathered into the amphitheatre at Lugdunum (lines 334-36),

whereas the tradition of the Church, represented by the Martyrologium Hieronymianum, gives the date of 2nd June.[69] Eusebius' greater dependability as a source, the explicit information in the letter of the Church, and the well-known importance of 1st August as the day of the meeting of the concilium Galliarum have led the majority of modern scholars to accept 1st August as the beginning of the second phase of the persecution.[70]

How, then, is one to explain the date of 2nd June? T. D. Barnes[71] suggests that the "easiest solution of the difficulty is to suppose that confusions have led to the error in the Martyrologium, which in its present form scarcely antedates 600"[72] (Eusebius wrote in the first half of the fourth century). What these confusions were Barnes does not indicate. If, however, the role of Commodus in the persecution at Lugdunum was greater than that of Marcus Aurelius (above, pages 13-14), the following explanation may be proposed: June 2nd, the beginning of the feast of Hercules,[73] was a date associated with the emperor Commodus, because of his well-known self-identification with Hercules.[74] Since the persecution at Lugdunum was traditionally associated with Commodus (because of the emperor's rescript), it is possible that writers of a later age not knowing the exact date, but aware that it occurred at a major feast, automatically linked the persecution with 2nd June rather than 1st August.

However that may be, if we accept 1st August as the beginning of the second phase of the persecution, the date can be used as anchor-point for calculating the approximate date of its first outbreak. Given that bureaucrats usually take time to answer, that the Christians, even

before the rescript had been sent for, had been tried, tortured and interrogated for some time, and that the governor, once he was in possession of the rescript, subsequently reserved the Christians for punishment during the games (the real purpose of the senatus consultum), it seems necessary to place the beginning of the persecution four to five months back into March or April 177. From here on, however, everything is speculation: perhaps the Christians came into conflict with the followers of Cybele who usually held a taurobolium close to Easter;[75] or did they refuse to participate in the festivities marking Marcus' birthday on 26th April?[76] Alternatively the reasons may have been of a totally different nature--for example, racial or economic troubles.[77] Whatever the cause of the persecution, one thing seems for certain: barring new evidence, the date of its outset will remain unknown.

C. Evidence from the Letter of the Church

In conclusion, an analysis of the events described in the letter sheds light on the religious background of the persecutors.

The letter of the Church tells us that red-hot objects of metal were applied (at least in the preliminary tortures) to the tenderest parts of one of the Christians' bodies (lines 142-43). While branding with irons is itself an act which a devotee of the Cult of Mithras quite possibly might have committed, the burning of the Christian's sensitive parts (surely a euphemistic expression for genitalia)[78] seems to indicate the intentional blotting out of the vires of the Christian, thus robbing him of the symbols which in the Cult of Cybele stood for strength, birth

and regeneration.[79] On the basis of this incident one would agree with A. Audin that the Cult of Cybele played an important role in the persecution.[80] On the other hand, testimony in the letter that some Christians had their limbs cut off and their bodies torn to shreds (lines 424-26) surely indicates that some of the persecutors were influenced by ancient Gallic practice, as well as confirming the impact of the senatus consultum on the events in Lugdunum. The final step in the treatment of the Christians was the burning of their bodies as punishment (lines 444-45). This too shows that the persecutors were motivated primarily by ideas foreign to Roman religion.[81] To a Roman it certainly would not appear a punishment to be burned after death, nor is it likely that a Roman would have devised cremation as a way to punish someone else; religious ideas of the time rather demanded burial sub ascia.[82] But to the followers of Cybele burning the Christians must have appeared as the final victory of their goddess. In the end this victory was crowned by sweeping the Christians' ashes into the river, the Gallic way of saying "go to hell"[83] (lines 445-47).

Most indications in the letter, then, point to the non-Roman attitude, religious background and actions of the persecutors in Lugdunum. If this is so, what part did the Imperial Cult play in the events? Most scholars think a small one or none at all.[84] One must rather keep in mind that not all the citizens who worshipped the emperor were in fact devotees of Roman gods. For those of other persuasions the games of the Imperial Cult were simply an outlet for their hatred of the Christians.[85]

NOTES

[1]It seems best to follow P. Keresztes (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 74) 261f. in excluding the supernatural reasons for the persecution mentioned in the letter of the Church.

[2]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 21.

[3]Above, 'Introduction,' note 4.

[4]The following four paragraphs are largely dependent upon the arguments of D. Fishwick, "The Development of Provincial Ruler Worship in the Western Roman Empire, "ANRW II.16.2 (1978) 1201-53; "The Federal Cult of the Three Gauls," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris 1978) 33-43 except where noted.

[5]CIL 13, 1664; also A. Audin, Essai sur la Topographie de Lugdunum (Lyon, 1964) 154.

[6]P. Herz, "Kaiserfeste der Principatszeit," ANRW II.16.2 (1978) 1146.

[7]See also Krascheninnikoff (above, 'Introduction,' note 5) 169.

[8]Krascheninnikoff (above, 'Introduction,' note 5) 172.

[9]Deininger, Provinziallandtage, 21.

[10]Fishwick (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 67) 1; see also R. Mellor, "The Goddess Roma," ANRW II.17.2 (1981) 967.

[11]M. Leglay, "Le Culte Impérial à Lyon, au 2e Siècle ap. J.-C.," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris 1978) 22.

[12]On the site see J. Guey and A. Audin, "Le Amphithéâtre des Trois Gaules à Lyon," Gallia 21 (1963) 125.

[13]Guey & Audin (above, note 12) 153.

[14]Possibly at his visit to Lugdunum 121 A.D.

[15]M. Grant, Gladiators (New York, 1967) 28; cf. Deininger, Provinziallandtage, 174.

[16]Temples were dedicated at Ephesus and Nikaia (Dio 51.20.6); q.v. Kornemann, Herrscherkulte, 99.

[17]Deininger, Provinziallandtage, 16f.; Krascheninnikoff (above, 'Introduction,' note 5) 151; M. P. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechischen Religion (München, 1967) 178.

[18]I. Weiler, Der Sport bei den Völkern der alten Welt (Darmstadt, 1981) 16.

[19]A. Hönle and A. Henze, Römische Amphitheater und Stadien, Gladiatorenkämpfe und Circusspiele (Freiburg, 1981) 13; Grant, Gladiators, 11f.; hence the gladiators were called bustuarii (funeral men).

[20]Cf. Homer, Odyssey 8.100ff.

[21]Weiler, Der Sport bei den Völkern der alten Welt, 20ff.

[22]Grant, Gladiators, 11; Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater und Stadien, Gladiatorenkämpfe und Circusspiele, 48.

[23]Herz (above, note 6) 1190-91.

[24]Weiler, Der Sport bei den Völkern der alten Welt, 98f.

[25]Nero wanted to bring the Greek sportsideal back to Rome (Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater, 31; Weiler, Sport, 235f.).

[26]Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater, 14.

[27]Grant, Gladiators, 28f.; Weiler, Sport, 235f.

[28]Hence the creation of the munus sacrum, the munus incorporated into the Imperial Cult (q.v. Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater, 56).

[29]Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater, 107: note that the games came to be regarded as a "staatserhaltende Institution."

[30]Deininger, Provinziallandtage, 160.

[31]The implications of this choice have been discussed above.

[32]Cf. Tertullian, De Spectaculis 4.

[33]A. Bernardi, "The Economic Problems of the Roman Empire," in C. M. Cipolla (ed.), The Economic Decline of Empires (London, 1970) 27.

[34]Gallic religion evidently continued to have its adherents; cf. the story of the Vocontian knight caught with an object used in Gallic occultism: see A. Momigliano, Claudius the Emperor and His Achievement (Cambridge, 1961) 92f.

[35]Fishwick, "The Federal Cult of the Three Gauls" (above, note 4) 35; "Claudius submersus," AJAH 3 (1978); Audin, Essai 159f.

[36]Fishwick, "The Federal Cult of the Three Gauls" (above, note 4) 35. Compare also the medieval southern German custom of 'Bäckerschupfen,' by which bakers whose bread fell short of standard weight and quality were confined in a cage and ducked into water as punishment.

[37]Notwithstanding the fact that the Gallic rites had always been viewed with disgust by the Romans (Janssen [above, 'Chapter 1,' note 35] 148). Marcus Aurelius, as his initial opposition to the senatus consultum shows, was no exception.

[38]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 140; L. Cracco Ruggini, "Les Structures de la Société et de l'Économie Lyonnaise au 2e Siècle, par Rapport à la Politique Locale et Impériale," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 80 speaks about a "renaissance culturelle gauloise."

[39]Known variously as the 'culte metroaque,' 'cult of Magna Mater,' 'cult of Attis.'

[40]R. Turcan, Les Religions de l'Asie dans la Vallée du Rhône (Leiden, 1972) 97.

[41]So M. Vermaseren, Cybele and Attis (London, 1977) 30. The first half of this paragraph is largely dependent upon the arguments of A. Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, pp. 148-80, except where noted.

[42]Audin refers to the "municipalisation du culte de Cybèle"; see also Audin (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 15) 56.

[43]Many cult objects have been found at Lyon; cf. P. Wuilleumier and A. Audin, Les Medaillons d'Applique Gallo-Romains de la Vallée du Rhône (Société d'Edition Les Belles Lettres; Paris, 1952) passim.

[44]Vermaseren, Cybele and Attis, 38ff.: the importance of this cult during the Punic wars is shown by the belief of the Romans that military success was contingent upon the goddess' presence in the city.

[45]Leglay (above, note 11) 20.

[46]R. Duthoy, The Taurobolium (EPRO 10; Leiden, 1969) 3.

[47]Vermaseren, Cybele and Attis, 35 says that there are indications that under Marcus Aurelius the cult was taken over by the Roman state.

[48]Leglay (above, note 11) 28.

[49]For a thorough discussion of taurobolia sacrificed on behalf of the emperor and his family, see Duthoy, The Taurobolium, 25-71 passim.

[50]Duthoy, The Taurobolium, 72f.; Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 154f.

[51]Duthoy, The Taurobolium, 54.

[52]The first half of this paragraph is largely dependent upon the arguments of R. Turcan, "Religions Orientales à Lugdunum en 177," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 199ff. except where noted. The dislike was mutual, the Cult of Mithras mocking the Holy Supper by its rites (Vermaseren, Cybele, 118) and some Christians desecrating the shrines of Mithras; for Judaism see Acts of the Apostles 9.23-25; 18.12-17; etc.

[53]Cf. C. M. Daniels, "The Role of the Roman Army in the Spread and Practice of Mithraism," Mithraic Studies 2 (1975) 249ff.

[54]Vermaseren, Cybele, 62 makes the important observation that the followers of Cybele, especially in later times, maintained close relations with those of Mithras.

[55]Cf. above, note 49.

[56]The same, according to Turcan, can be said of Vienne, the hometown of some of the martyrs.

[57]Cf. HE 5.1.21.

[58]W. de Boor, Die Apostelgeschichte (Wuppertaler Studienbibel vol. 5; Wuppertal, 1977) 359.

[59]Bernard (above, 'Introduction,' note 1) 106.

[60]See also Justin's comments on Jews plotting against the Christians (HE 4.18.7).

[61]C. Pietri, "Les Origines de la Mission Lyonnaise: Remarques Critiques," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 212.

[62]HE 4.21; Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 180 says that "l'orthodoxie est fermement maintenue par Irénée."

[63]Simon (above, note 62) 262, 264.

[64]Cf. Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 179f.; H. Kraft, "Die Märtyrer und der Montanismus," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 243; Phipps (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 29) 179-81.

[65]These statements are contrary to the opinion of Phipps (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 29) 171-201, who believed that Montanist influence was to blame for the persecution in Gaul.

[66]W. Frend, "Blandina and Perpetua," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 174.

[67]Kraft (above, note 66) 243; Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 179.

[68]Cf. Kraft (above, note 70) 236; also T. D. Barnes, "Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum," JThS NS. 19 (1968) 517.

[69]Acta Sanctorum vol. 21 (Junii, tomus primus for June 2) 152-64.

[70]Barnes (above, note 70) 518; Leglay (above, note 11) 20; Deininger, Provinziallandtage, 104f.

[71]Barnes (above, note 70) 518.

[72]W. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church, 2 places the martyrology into the early fifth century.

[73]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 175; J. Colin, "Martyrs Grecs de Lyon ou Martyrs Galates?" L'Antiquité Classique 33 (1964) 109 notes that the actual date of the feast of Hercules is 4th June. The date of 2nd June is arrived at by analogy with the birthday of Marcus Aurelius on 26th April, which began to be celebrated two days in advance.

It must be noted here that Colin was the first scholar to associate the date 2nd June with Commodus on the basis of the Commodus-Hercules idea. However, his notion that this idea was already alive in 177, and because of it a feast given on 2nd June 177, is inconsistent with the fact that Commodus' self-identification with that legendary hero did not occur until 15 years later when Commodus proclaimed himself Invictus Romanus Hercules in 192 A.D. (Sandys, Latin Epigraphy, 240).

[74]SHA, Commodus passim.

[75]P. M. Duval, La Vie Quotidienne en Gaule pendant la Paix Romaine (Paris, 1952) 315; Vermaseren, Cybele, 41, 113, 180.

[76]E. Demougeot, "Apropos des Martyrs Lyonnais de 177," REA 68 (1968) 325.

[77]Vermaseren, Cybele, 124 mentions that priests of Cybele in Rome were permitted to collect money during the Megalensia. If this would have been permitted in Lugdunym, it would be conceivable that the Christians' unwillingness to contribute resulted in serious frictions between them and the devotees of Cybele.

[78]Displays of erotic nature were common enough at the circus (cf. Hönle & Henze, Römische Amphitheater, 58); see also Speigl, Der römische Staat u. die Christen, 185 who, discussing the persecution at Lugdunum, talks of a "pikantes Schauspiel."

[79]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 150-55.

[80]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 178, 180.

[81]The persecution at Lugdunum has been described as being of the "Asian" type (cf. Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 147; also Keresztes [above, 'Chapter 1,' note 74] 277).

[82]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 146.

[83]Fishwick (above, note 35) 76f.

[84]Janssen (above, 'Chapter 1,' note 35) 132 quoting F. Millar, "The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions," in W. den Boer, Le Culte des Souverains dans l'Empire Romain (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 19; Geneva, 1972) 145-75: "The persecutions cannot be explained in political terms . . . they were motivated by feelings which we must call religious. The Imperial Cult was not of any real significance." De Ste. Croix (above, 'Introduction,' note 11) 10.

[85]Leglay (above, note 11) 22.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE PERSECUTION AT LUGDUNUM 177 A.D.

Persecutions are not always a result of just political or religious circumstances but often a symptom of racial, social or economic troubles at a given location. Can, then, the persecution be explained in terms of such problems at Lugdunum?

A. Racial and Ethnic Aspects

Whether the persecution was an outburst of racial trouble, caused by the clash of different nationalities, clearly depends upon the ethnic origins of the Christians at Lugdunum in relation to the nationalities represented in the city's population. Ever since Colin argued[1] that the persecution of 177 took place in an obscure town in the province of Asia (in which case most of the persecuted and the persecutors would have been Asian), study of the racial background(s) of the Christians has been an important part of research into the events of 177. This inquiry has been severely limited by the scarcity of pertinent information, a scarcity without which a thesis such as that of J. Colin could never have been proposed.[2] The first-hand information we have amounts to this: ten names of martyrs in the letter of the Church and 48 names in the Acta Sanctorum.[3] From the nature of the evidence it is

clear that prosopographical study is the only way to tackle the topic; but this approach is made difficult because of the tendency, from ca. 150 A.D. on, to exchange eastern names for Latin ones in order to hide one's slave origin.[4] Conversely, the continuing pride of some people in their eastern roots[5] makes it quite hard to arrive at firm conclusions. Further obstacles are the fact that not all Greek names indicate that the bearer is Greek,[6] but indicate slave origin rather than nationality,[7] while, in the particular case of Gaul, one has to allow for the tendency to return to Gallic ethnic roots in the second century A.D.[8]

On the basis of the names preserved in our sources, the ratio of eastern to western Christians at Lugdunum works out to ca. 40:60 percent.[9] These 40 percent have been allocated to people of Greek origin in the first instance,[10] then Phrygians[11] and various other nationalities. There is also the possibility, never before considered, that some of the Christians who were identified as Phrygians were in reality people of Gallic stock and language, whose ancestors had emigrated to Galatia; having left the place of their birth, these were attracted back to the country of their ancestors or came there in order to be missionaries among people who spoke the same language as themselves. Clearly, the prosopographical method needs to be augmented by research that would give a deeper insight into the ethnic situation at Lugdunum, in particular, information on which occupations in antiquity were likely to be held by what nationals. We know, for example, that banking was a favourite occupation of the Greeks,[12] as was medicine,[13] that Phrygians were active in selling the products of their home-country (e.g., wool) in the west,[14] that a detachment of Galatian soldiers was probably stationed in Lugdunum,

where veterans often went into business after having been discharged from units which were stationed in the area.[15] Other pertinent information can be gleaned from details in the letter of the Church, such as certain precepts of faith of the Christians at Lugdunum which may indicate that the Church included, or was founded in an area of Jewish settlers.[16] Again the observation that some Christians during the trial answered in Latin (lines 136, 374-77) indicates that some, although easterners, had made an effort to assimilate themselves to their new surroundings, and others possibly were of western stock. We may thus conclude that Lugdunum, like most large urban centres in antiquity, was a melting-pot of nationalities;[17] the membership of its Christian community patently reflects the fact. But did these nationalities clash on a racial basis, and if so, what evidence is there that such clashes sparked the persecution? Apart from signs of a "Gallic cultural renaissance,"[18] the consequences of which the Christians were to suffer during the persecution, there exists only one statement which could be interpreted as a sign of racial tension. "Wild and maddened people"[19] (line 412) could be a Greek's statement about people whom he considered barbarians,[20] and might, as it stands, be interpreted as an indication of racial tension between easterners (the Christians) and westerners (the persecutors). However, it must be noted that these "wild and maddened people" in all likelihood included devotees of eastern cults who tended to be mostly of eastern origins. So the description could apply to all pagan persecutors, regardless of nationality, and hence be hardly interpreted as a sign of racial tension. It is of course conceivable that eastern Christians in Lugdunum would have incurred the enmity of local people just as today

foreign nationals, who do not want to conform, encounter prejudice in modern society. On the whole, however, there exists no clear indication of racial trouble as the cause of the persecution of 177.

B. Social Aspects

The reign of Marcus Aurelius was marked by profound changes within the social fabric of the Roman state. To take account of these and to try to establish whether they were factors in the persecution at Lugdunum is a necessary part of any attempt to interpret the events of 177.

Hand in hand with the ravages of continual warfare[21] and local outbreaks of the plague[22] went the barbarization of the Roman state in general, and that of the Italian heartland in particular.[23] At the same time, the lower classes gained an importance while the higher classes declined throughout the empire,[24] a phenomenon evident in an acute shortage of persons qualified to serve as _decuriones_ in the cities.[25] The most latinized element in the outlying areas of the empire, this group had been decimated by war and pestilence and, as a result of economic pressures at the time, had lost much of its wealth. Now, in the face of crisis, it was unwilling to spend funds on public works and charities and risk financial ruin.[26] The refusal of the _decuriones_ of Lugdunum to provide expensive games is a good example of this attitude. The result was that Marcus had to bring in new laws, on the one hand forcing the remaining _decuriones_ to do their duties, on the other admitting the lower strata of the population, even Jews,[27] into this privileged class. The lesson of all this was that if the lower classes

once united in protest against what they perceived as exploitation, they could exert enough pressure to effect changes. So, in Egypt, for example, the Bucoli revolted.[28] Others, especially in Gaul, decided they would no longer fulfil their duties as members of society, and, having deserted from the army, formed bands and began to live off the spoils of brigandage.[29]

In this time of troubles the steadily increasing Christian element, particularly in Gaul, will undoubtedly have added to the strains upon society. The social status of Christians in the Roman empire has always been hotly debated by scholars, in our century principally by Marxists and anti-Marxists.[30] The former have argued that Christianity was a protest movement of slaves and other low-class people against the Roman establishment, finally overpowering it. Anti-Marxist scholars have generally rejected this conclusion as too simplistic in the light of New Testament passages showing that even in the early days of Christianity, when most believers were of low rank, there were already important, rich and powerful Christians.[31] Further research in the form of case studies has shown that by the second century A.D. Christianity was attracting educated people and individuals from higher social classes.[32] The letter of the Church provides a glimpse of the membership of the Church at Lugdunum which on the face of it supports the anti-Marxist case.[33] There are Roman citizens and non-Romans, people of the propertied class, slaves and professionals, in short, people of various social strata, not members of just one class. In the light of this evidence one can only conclude that the persecution in Lugdunum was not a matter of members of one social class fighting those of another; such details as we have hardly

add up to a clear-cut episode of class-struggle. Rather, we see people who themselves belong to different social classes persecuting a group whose members likewise belong to various strata of society.

C. Economic Life

To complete this study of the probable causes for the events at Lugdunum 177, we must turn to the economic situation of the Roman empire in general, narrowing the field to Gaul and Lugdunum in an attempt to determine whether economic problems could have sparked the persecution. The letter of the Church provides crucial evidence in this connection. By the second half of the second century A.D. the economy of the Roman empire was running down. Wasteful by nature,[34] yet no longer supported by the influx of new wealth from conquered areas,[35] strained by the loss of human expertise[36] and labour through war[37] and pestilence,[38] it seemed to have been pushed to its limits.[39] The economic measures of Marcus Aurelius speak for themselves: the Imperial treasure had to be auctioned off in order to aid the public purse;[40] a donative was refused to the soldiers on the grounds that it would 'be wrung from the blood of their relatives;[41] debts were cancelled,[42] taxes cut,[43] customs districts transferred from private to government control due to the lack of publicani willing to take them over;[44] to keep the peace the barbarians were paid off handsomely;[45] in a final effort to enable the decuriones of the cities to save funds Marcus brought in the law of the aes Italicense. Above all, as most scholars agree, high inflation laid the foundation for the economic breakdown of the third century A.D.[46]

Gaul naturally suffered along with the rest of the empire. Its economy, based on large-scale trade[47] with the outlying areas of the empire (Germany, the Danube country, Egypt, etc.),[48] was severely cut back in a time of diminishing demand[49] and mounting prices. Lugdunum itself, still an important supply depot for the armies[50] and the west in general, managed to remain an important economic centre.[51] The necessities of life were still needed; grain; wool, wine, fish either imported or exported;[52] the brotherhoods (collegia or factiones) of riverboat-captains and merchants still contributed to the livelihood of the city. But signs of recession were everywhere: in particular, manufacturers of luxury articles had to slow down their production,[53] a process leading to total work-stoppage for some companies around 200 A.D.[54] It was obvious that the heyday of the economy of Lugdunum was over for good.[55] Especially hard hit must have been all those occupations which furnished goods and services not necessary for basic survival and too expensive to afford at a time of inflation and recession.[56]

At this point it is essential to glance at the distribution of occupations between Christians and non-Christians. Studies on the subject show that Christians would generally be employed in fields which did not make one rich fast[57] but which were essential for life[58] (as cobblers, bakers, fishermen, doctors, etc.). They did not, however, take jobs which were in any way involved in, or catered to, pagan worship (e.g., the circus games).[59] In Lugdunum, the famous tourist city so well known for its games and cult-festivities,[60] such tasks were performed by non-Christians. It is a reasonable assumption, therefore, that, when the slow-down came in the economy of Lugdunum, non-Christians will have

been the first to feel the pinch. They may well have looked with envy at those Christians who had always avoided their establishments, never giving them a chance to profit from their orders.

Hints in the letter of the Church suggest that at Lugdunum, as elsewhere earlier,[61] economic reasons were of some importance in the persecution of Christians: the Christians are reported, for instance, to have been subjected to acts of spoliation and plundering (line 29). Other passages, hitherto interpreted as signs of a general persecution,[62] tell the same story. A passage recording that the Christians were excluded from all public places of business (lines 15-18) appears in a new light when compared with a statement of Tertullian, who in answering the charge of slothfulness leveled against the Christians in general, says that they are in fact doing their jobs in the forum and other public places (Apol. 42.1&2). The impression of economic motives is strengthened by a further passage indicating that "all those through whom the life of the locality was kept together"[63] were arrested (lines 80-81). Other information in the letter provides further support. We hear that even non-Christian slaves of Christian masters were arrested (lines 81-82), and apostates not released (lines 227-30), both actions in flagrant contravention of the law, custom and rescript.[64] It might be argued that these occurrences were part of a concerted effort to shut down Christian businesses completely. The easiest way to do this would have been to rob the Christians, "illegitimately confederated,"[65] of all their work-force (i.e., people who would have continued to work in their absence), and through continued incarceration prevent others, even if they apostasized, from taking up their jobs again.

What all this adds up to is that, on the evidence of the letter, a possible reason for the outbreak of the persecution at Lugdunum will have been the desire of non-Christians to appropriate the Christians' possessions. That the resulting pogrom affected many against whom the actions were not directed primarily only increases the tragedy of the events.

NOTES

[1]Colin (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 75) 108-15.

[2]G. Thomas, "La Condition Sociale de l'Église de Lyon en 177," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 96; Demougeot (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 78) 326; Scheele, Zur Rolle der Unfreien in den römischen Christenverfolgungen, 36.

[3]Cf. H. Quentin, "La Liste des Martyrs de Lyon de l'An 177," Analecta Bollandiana 1 (1921) 113-38.

[4]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 140.

[5]J. Rougé, "Aspects Économiques du Lyon Antique," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 48.

[6]Rougé (above, note 5) 48f., 60.

[7]Rougé (above, note 5) 60.

[8]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 140.

[9]Thomas (above, note 2) 96f.

[10]Pietri (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 63) 221; F. Millar, "Culture Greque et Culture Latine," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 187 notes that Churches in the west were generally founded by Greeks.

[11]G. Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte (Wiesbaden, 1975) 123 notes that Phrygians made up a large part of the slave population and often sold themselves into slavery.

[12]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 140 emphasises that new arrivals in Lugdunum were sometimes drawn by relatives. This appears to strengthen the point made here. S. Mitchell, "Population and Land in Roman Galatia," ANRW II.7.2 (1980) 1058 notes that Celtic was spoken in Galatia into the late 6th century A.D. (esp. in the countryside), and that Celtic place names often superseded Phrygian forms.

[13]Cf. Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 138f.; J. Rougé (above, note 5) 59-61; M. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1957) 180.

[14]Rougé (above, note 5) 61.

[15]A. Grenier, "La Gaule Romaine," in An Economic Survey of

Ancient Rome vol. 3 (Baltimore, 1937) 556, based on CIL 13, 1906.

[16]Simon (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 62) 262.

[17]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 137-39.

[18]Cracco Ruggini (abbve, 'Chapter 2,' note 38) 80.

[19]HE 5.1.7 "egriomenon plethos," HE 5.1.57 "agria kai barbara phyla."

[20]Cf. Cracco Ruggini (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 38) 80 for a note on "l'allusion fameuse d'Irénée à la 'langue barbare.'" Millar (above, note 10) 189-93.

[21]SHA, Marcus 17.2; cf. Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 305; Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte, 139-41.

[22]For an overview of the historical sources on the Antonian Plague see J. F. Gilliam, "The Plague under Marcus Aurelius," AJPh 82 (1961) 225-51; R. J. Littman and M. L. Littman, M.D., "Galen and the Antonian Plague," AJPh 94 (1973) 243-55.

[23]SHA, Marcus 24.3; Dio Cassius, Epitome of 72.11.5.

[24]See R. McMullen, Roman Social Relations (New Haven-London, 1974) 103; P. A. Brunt, "The Roman Mob," in Studies in Ancient Society (Past & Present Series [ed. M. Finley]; London, 1974) 89.

[25]Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte, 143.

[26]T. Pekary, Die Wirtschaft der griechisch-römischen Antike (Wiesbaden, 1979) 120.

[27]For a discussion and a listing of pertinent historical sources see L. Neesen, "Die Entwicklung der Leistungen und Ämter," Historia 30 (1981) 225-29.

[28]Dio Cassius, Epitome of 72.4.1.

[29]Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, 374; McMullen, Roman Social Relations, 2; Grenier (above, note 15) 564f.; R. McMullen, Enemies of the Roman Order (Cambridge, 1966) 195.

[30]Vogt (above, 'Introduction,' note 14) 7; H. Kreissig, "Zur sozialen Zusammensetzung der frühchristlichen Gemeinden im ersten Jahrhundert unserer Zeit," Eirene 6 (1967) 93.

[31]Kreissig (above, note 31) 97ff.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Cf. Thomas (above, note 2) 93-106 passim.

[34]E.g.: R. Duncan-Jones' observation in The Economy of the Roman Empire (Cambridge, 1974) 34 that the Romans had no means of low cost land transport.

[35]Bernardi (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 33) 32.

[36]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 229, 243, 247.

[37]This necessitated stern enforced conscription (Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History, 128f., 374).

[38]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 217.

[39]E. Kornemann, Römische Geschichte vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1942) 320 notes that "die wirtschaftliche und geldliche Not wuchs ins Ungewisse." Note also that the laws designed to improve the lot of the lower classes were enormously expensive to carry through (Bernardi [above, 'Chapter 2,' note 33) 19f.).

[40]Zonaras, Epitome of Histories 12.1 (a passage thought to be excerpted from Dio).

[41]Birley, Marcus Aurelius, 230.

[42]Dio Cassius, Epitome of 72.32.2.

[43]Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History, 373.

[44]Pekary, Die Wirtschaft der griechisch-römischen Antike, 117.

[45]Dio Cassius, Epitome of 72.11.1.

[46]Grenier (above, note 15) 563; P. Oliva, "Zum Problem der Finanzkrise im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus im römischen Reich," Altertum 8 (1962) 44.

[47]Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 24.

[48]Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History, 153; Rougé (above, note 5) 59-61 passim; Turcan (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 52) 197.

[49]Grenier (above, note 15) 574 notes that Gaul was prosperous in the first century A.D. when the population was high; when it dropped (p. 575) economic problems set in.

[50]For the large numbers of troops stationed on the northern borders; cf. Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte, 84.

[51]Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte, 86 notes that agriculture was the main source of wealth; see also Grenier (above, note 15) 578.

[52]Rougé (above, note 5) 56-59; Grenier (above, note 15) 579-89 passim.

[53]On manufacturers of luxury articles see A. Audin, "La Population de Lugdunum au 2e Siècle," Cahiers d'Histoire 15 (1970) 5; Rougé (above, note 5) 62; A. Audin, "Présentation de Lugdunum," in Les Martyrs de Lyon (CNRS 575; Paris, 1978) 16; Alföldi, Römische Sozialgeschichte, 84; Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 105, 125f.

[54]Pekary, Wirtschaft, 117.

[55]After almost continuous growth since the founding of the city, the economy of Lugdunum went into decline 160 A.D. (Audin, Lyon, Miroir de Rome, 107) never to return to its former highpoint.

[56]Pekary, Wirtschaft, 117.

[57]This does not mean that the Christians were all poor; cf. Turcan (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 52) 207f.

[58]R. M. Grant, Early Christianity and Society (San Francisco, 1979) 79-95.

[59]Grant, Early Christianity and Society, 79ff.

[60]The economic impact of religious feasts was considerable in the creation of jobs and generation of wealth (McMullen, Roman Social Relations, 25, 55f.).

[61]HE 4.26.5.

[62]The persecution appears not to have been general. If that were the case, HE 5.1.9&10 and HE 5.1.49, where we are told that well-known Christians appeared unmolested in front of the tribunal and were only arrested after they undertook to help the accused, could not be explained; cf. Thomas (above, note 2) 93.

[63]Translation by Kirsopp Lake.

[64]Scheele, Zur Rolle der Unfreien, 45, 123f., 129.

[65]Cracco Ruggini (above, 'Chapter 2,' note 38) 65-67, 89-91.

CONCLUSION

In the face of such statements as "dass er damals seinen Sohn Commodus zur Mitregentschaft berief, ist für die Christenfrage nicht unmittelbar von Bedeutung geworden"[1] or "the events of Lugdunum 177 A.D. are the result of a local urban riot,"[2] the discussion has tried to show that it is not possible to explain the complex happenings at Lugdunum by straightforward generalisations. While no one could claim to have all the answers, the ideas presented here are offered in the hope that they will add something new to the extensive amount of scholarship already existing.

The most important findings of this study are the following. Nothing in Marcus' personality and only little in his training could have prompted him to become a persecutor of the Church. Nevertheless, laws were passed during his reign which made it possible for people, prompted by various motives, to persecute Christians. While it is true that none of these laws seems to be aimed specifically at the Christians, the emperor, as head of state, must still bear the responsibility for the abuses which they made possible. As regards the Imperial directive to the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, it may be incorrect automatically to attribute the rescript to Marcus. A strong possibility exists that it was, rather, the work of Commodus, who was now full co-emperor and may have been called upon to take an active part in governing at a time when his father was indisposed. In any event, the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis is guilty of flagrantly contravening the law, established

custom and the spirit of the emperor's rescript in his treatment of the Christians.

Despite the date of 1st August, blame for the persecution should not be placed on practitioners of the federal Imperial Cult. It was, rather, the members of local mystery cults, the rivals of Christianity, who used the games marking the meeting of the concilium Galliarum as an outlet for their hatred of Christianity.

As for the theory that racial tensions caused the outbreak of the persecution in Lugdunum, positive proof is lacking; but evidence in the letter does point to the importance of economic issues as a factor in the events of 177. Finally, it is possible that the Christians at Lugdunum were perceived as enemies of society and persecuted for that reason also.

NOTES

[1]Speigl, Der römische Staat und die Christen, 178.

[2]Brunt (above, 'Chapter 3,' note 25) 268.

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